

June 3, 1966

Dr. Jerome B. Wiesner
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Dear Jerry:

Thank you very much for your phone advice a couple of weeks ago, which disturbed me to make a more reasonable concession as against "no travel", and visit Washington to make the seminar on Senator Harris's committee. I guess I would be perplexed to try to foretell what the long range impact of this is going to be, but I certainly had to agree with your evaluation of Senator Harris, and I enjoyed meeting him very much. I guess the main philosophical issue at the seminar was a debate between Al Weinberg and myself about the fundamental premises of social support for science, what he calls the Baconian vs. the Newtonian point of view. My thinking about this was finally triggered by Senator Harris's remark that our investment in science to date had certainly paid off, as witnessed by our preeminent technological, hence economic, position in the world. It was a little difficult for me to trace this directly to the factual information generated by basic science in this country and I realized that it was the kind of education underlying the later performance of our technologists that we have to look for this position. So I try to build a case that while there might be the most immediate interest in the support of identifiable projects, and we should by no means overturn the project system; nevertheless each research project is in fact subsidized by the intellectual context of the institution in which it is carried out and has certainly a corresponding responsibility for the education of the practitioners of these useful arts. I am sure none of these ideas are novel to you, and as you have been quoted at least once, the main resistance to the broadening of research support is likely to come precisely from our most monomaniacal scientific colleagues. Certainly there will be ample grounds for distress if we do not evolve a mixed strategy which retains a good deal of the quality control and conservation of existing resources that the project system insulates but at the same time allows for the health of some of the other functions of our institutions and for their new growth at places besides present strength.

A few months ago you also helped me clarify my thinking about the policy for development of the ABM and I am really obliged to you for keeping me from committing myself to an over-rationalized, hence, aggressive, course of action vis a vis China. You may recall that I was taken in by the argument that we

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needed an ABM at a moderate level capable of improving our defense against some limited Chinese bomb capability. But I neglected to picture the world model that would ensue if indeed this precise objective were obtained: one in which the U.S. feels its homeland secure, but where Japan, India, Southeast Asia are all vulnerable to Chinese nuclear power. If the strategic deterrent means anything at all, the territory of the United States is absolutely the last target that the Chinese would think about for the use of their new aggressive potential. On the contrary, they would encourage every step that would divide the United States from the rest of the world, and certainly differential security would play right into their hands!

Of course the main fallacy in my earlier line of thinking was the expectation that a political entity is capable of pursuing any pure rational policy whatsoever. It is no special denigration of the United States to doubt that we would be able, for example, to implement a pure strategic preemptive ultimatum with respect to Chinese nuclear industry. Instead, inevitably, there would be the contamination by all kinds of dangerous tactical concerns, for example, the question of our bases in Southeast Asia, and once one looks at this model, there is no point even discussing any kind of aggressive preemptive action. This leave me no less frightened than it does you, but I've come to understand what I believe to be your position, that you have deferred the larger problem as essentially hopeless to deal with now, and have substituted a smaller one—some rapprochement with the USSR—as a more approachable but indispensable goal.

I thank you for your patience and remain,

Sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

Enclosures: Experimental Genetics and Human Evolution
Costing Human Life